

Letter from Palestine

By ROBERTA HODES, '46



Roberta Hodes has been in Israel since last May, making documentary films for the Israeli Film Co., an official Israeli group. Her work includes writing scripts, preparing scenarios and some acting; she has played in two films and was able to ad lib in Hebrew in one part. These films will be shown in the U.S.A. this spring.

THE announced itinerary of the Marine Carp leaving New York May 4, 1948: Pireaus, Beirut, Haifa. The farewell crowds were slowly receding into the skyline when I began to hang up my clothes in a renovated officer's cabin on A deck. The close quarters of the Marine Carp, which lacked room for meditation or recreation, provided ample opportunity for early acquaintance with the passengers. The majority were persons my age returning to Palestine from schools all over the United States. In eleven days, on May 15th, the United Nations decision to partition Palestine into two separate states was to become effective, but the peaceful emergence of the State of Israel could no longer be considered possible, for the Arab states had announced their defiance of the UN decision. The united action by the United States and the Soviet Union in voting "Yes" for partition had recently been broken by the former's change of mind. The British trained Arab Legion, the Egyptians, Syrians, Iraqi and Lebanese were alerted for invasion. A country smaller than Vermont, with an Army that from inception had to function underground because self-defense was illegal under the British mandate, was under attack by five surrounding states. We passengers en route to Haifa could not foresee the outcome of this battle, but we were unified in our purpose to be part of it.

A short wave radio kept us in contact with America and Europe. The owner sat on top deck all day and night, the focal point on the ship. The vicissitudes of American and UN policy bred pessimism; a violent ocean storm sent more passengers below each day. On May 14, the night before partition, the ship came to life. Drenched by the rain and the overflowing waves, we heard Truman's proclamation of recognition of the State of Israel. It was a gay prelude to the celebration of May 15 when 120 Jewish passengers presented an evening of Palestinian songs and dances. To the music of an harmonica and a shepherd's flute, the pioneer "Hora" and the Virginia Reel shook the ship until morning.

Search and Arrest at Beirut

On May 19th the Marine Carp docked at Beirut. I was relaxing on an upper berth after the last steak

dinner I was to have in the Middle East, when one of the crew told me and my cabinmates to come on deck immediately with our passports. The card salon had been taken over by Lebanese armed guards. I joined the line of passengers that circled around the ship, waiting and watching the Lebanese officials take down name, sex, citizenship, age and passport number. While I was waiting, a cabin-mate informed me that my baggage was being searched. Before I could get below, police with machine guns brought me back to the line. When I had given the required information I was allowed to go to my cabin under protection of three Lebanese guards. The contents of my luggage had been overturned, the lining of one bag ripped off in the search. As I watched, a Lebanese officer went through the contents again as a gesture to the requirement that permission be granted before baggage is ransacked. Later in the day my trunk, in the hold, was searched also.

When I returned to the upper deck I found the passengers and crew bewildered. The Lebanese government was detaining an American ship while a representative of the American government, the consul in Lebanon, stood on board, watching the investigators, laughing and telling us to take it easy.

At dinner time the search for information was still fruitless. The Captain of the Marine Carp told us that this invasion by the Lebanese of an American ship was permissible under the laws of the high seas. I learned later, however, that a group of passengers had been to see him several days previously to warn him that such an incident might occur, and to suggest sailing to Haifa before Beirut. He had assured them that such notions were fantastic.

At eight o'clock the ship's broadcasting system requested all passengers bound for Haifa to gather in the dining room and elect three representatives to meet with the Captain and the American consul. We voted quickly. The purpose of the day's events was finally revealed. All males, regardless of citizenship or age, were to leave the ship immediately with the Lebanese. The advice of the American consul was to comply with the order if we wanted to avoid trouble.

The men were loaded into waiting guarded trucks, each carrying a small parcel of clothing for their night's stay in Lebanon. The women stood on deck, waving goodbye, and singing the Hebrew song "Have-nue Sholam Aleichem"—"We brought you Peace"—until the guard that had remained on board pushed them below. The consul said we would see the men in a day's time in Haifa. We didn't see them until three months later.



ROBERTA HODESS AFTER A DAY'S WORK ON THE FARM. ANOTHER JOB WAS TO STAND NIGHT GUARD DUTY ON THE WATER TOWER NEAR WHICH SHE IS STANDING.

On a Palestine Farm

My destination on reaching Palestine was Ein Hashofet, agricultural settlement north-west of Haifa. Ein Hashofet, meaning *Eye of the Judge*, is an eleven year old cooperative farm named after Justice Brandeis, and the first Kibbutz in Palestine created by Americans. It is well-known that Jews from all over the world have made the Kibbutzim, flourishing farms in country barren for 2000 years. Now some of these were repelling attacks by Egyptian, Syrian and Iraqi forces.

I joined a group of Americans who were proceeding to Ein Hashofet for a period of training before setting off independently to build their own kibbutz. They had come from California, Minnesota, New York, and Canada spending their last years in the States functioning as a collective group on a farm in New Jersey.

My first hours in Ein Hashofet began in the Dining Hall. It is a large, wooden structure shaded by trees. Two long rows of tables and benches, seating eight at each, fill the room. The Dining Hall is also the Social Hall. Between meal hours, groups gather to drink tea and talk. When the weekly educational meetings are held, the dining hall becomes a lecture hall; on festive occasions it is a theatre, a concert auditorium, a temporary art museum. The path leading to the en-

trance emerges from behind the water tower, the highest building in all the kibbutzim. It circles a flower garden that changes colors with the seasons. A carefully planted and tended lawn of grass behind the Dining Hall becomes a central park for the workers. Its trees, benches, and wading pool are the playground of the kibbutz family. After work the parents take the children from their houses and spend their free hours together.

Ein Hashofet is situated in the Hills of Ephraim. From the watch tower, with the aid of binoculars, you can view the Mediterranean to the west, the coastal sands to the south, the Emek or Valley, the hills of Trans-Jordan, the Hills of Galilee, the peak of Mount Hermon to the east, and to the north Haifa Bay, Acre, and Naharia. As I drove into the kibbutz I saw small forests of Jerusalem and Cypress Pines, Carobs, and Parkensonia; on the lower lands, in terraced landscaping, I saw fruit orchards, and, nearer the kibbutz, the parallel lines of a vegetable garden.

During my stay at Ein Hashofet I lived in a sea-green, concrete floored army tent with one of the girls from the Marine Corp who was awaiting her husband's return from Beirut. A housing shortage had followed me 6000 miles. For in addition to the regular members of the kibbutz and the new group from



Photos by Lewis Feuer.

IN THE STREETS OF TEL AVIV, WHERE SHE IS NOW WORKING IN THE STUDIO OF THE ISRAELI FILM COMPANY.

America and Canada, there were soldiers temporarily stationed for training, workers from Haifa who were needed to fill in for the drafted men in building shelters and harvesting, and a group of youth from Europe, refugees and former displaced persons.

All property is owned in common on the kibbutzim and no money circulates within the group. Even the members of the American "gareen" or nucleus pooled all their clothes and other belongings. If a member was short any necessary clothing he could go to the community store house and complete his wardrobe.

Jobs: Farming and Guarding

The work sheet of the farm listing the jobs to be done by each member is made out every night by an elected committee and posted on the bulletin board in the Dining Hall. The specialists, of course, have held the same jobs for years—in the cow barns, the tree nurseries, schools, etc. But during this critical period manpower had to be allocated in accordance with security needs. Thirty men were sent each week to the highest hill in the surroundings as lookouts. A guard was needed all day on the water tower; and every man and woman gave several hours a week for night watch on the outposts of the kibbutz. Military training is held for all newcomers and everyone is expected to know how to handle a rifle if not a sten gun.

I was a "P-kock" or cork—a kibbutz term for a worker who can be used to fill in anywhere. My first job was to drive a team of mules back and forth from a rock pile where I filled buckets with rocks and brought them to a strategic place. The work sheet also assigned me to picking plums, planting trees, hanging clothes, washing pots, carrying milk from barn to kitchen, and cutting down brush.

Work finishes at 6:00, when there is a rush for the showers. At the end of the first work day I stumbled wearily under a shower and turned the cold water on full force. I stood for several minutes, feeling the water, and undergoing a complete physical revival. Then a woman under the next shower gestured to me, speaking above the roar of the water: "Ayn harbe mayim B Ein Hashofet". Someone translated: "There isn't a lot of water in Ein Hashofet." I had been deluging myself in enough water for several people and a vegetable garden. (The settlers had a constant struggle with the land and the lack of water. The trees, plants and vegetables I had seen were cultivated only after rock after rock had been cleared from the fields. When they first came, much of the land was considered uncultivable; there was not a single tree. There were still days at Ein Hashofet when there was no water.) After a short period of observation I learned to get wet for a moment, soap up, and rinse off. It was efficient.

Education at Ein Hashofet

The most beautiful buildings on the kibbutz were the children's houses and the schools (when I first came). They are two-story modern buildings of shining white

concrete. After continued air alarms they were camouflaged to blend in with the landscape. Near the children's houses are underground shelters equipped with triple-decker beds. Each adult is assigned to a child whom he cares for when the warning siren sounds.

Education follows the project method; and correlation, as in my day at Vassar, is a key word. The eight and nine year olds, for example, study the Olive Tree, a leading Palestinian project. Theoretical training in tree cultivation and the manufacture of soap and oil in their laboratory are part of the curriculum, as is a visit to the factory where these goods are produced. The teachers are well-trained and several times a year attend seminars held by the central association of kibbutzim.

At Ein Hashofet, a graduate of Harvard was the teacher in charge of the youth from Europe. These children, ranging from twelve to seventeen, present special educational problems. Grown up during the war years, they have had no previous systematic education. They are learning Hebrew, literature, science, and mathematics in addition to working several hours each day on the farm.

Children Live Apart from Parents

The special children's houses of the kibbutzim are under the care of trained nurses and teachers. The child, from the moment he returns from the hospital after birth, lives in one of them. The theory behind this radical change in child rearing is that those who know best how to work with children should do so. If animal and plant breeding requires special training, no less is needed for rearing children. Practically it works out that the parents have a regulated number of work hours and that their free time can be spent with their children. Parents are relieved of feeding and disciplinary problems; family life is free from tension, affectionate, and happy.

The progress of the war reaches the kibbutz daily through radio and newspapers. Several times a month military and political leaders gave reports and analyses of the current situation. Latest Israel films and films from America are shown. Guests from other countries appeared frequently. While I was at Ein Hashofet, I. F. Stone, Leo Isaacson, and Arthur Koestler visited. The two former were bombarded with questions about American public opinion toward Israel, chances for aid and full recognition.

Koestler's Book Considered False Picture

Mr. Koestler was not received as warmly. His book *Thieves In The Night*, which uses Ein Hashofet as partial background, is considered a fallacious and dangerous description of farm life in Israel. His hero's decision to join a terrorist group is one which is anathematic to Israel's farmers. They believe that one who understands the work of a kibbutz, or who works to build the land for the future, could never sympathize with those aligned with destruction.



CHILDREN AT EIN HASHOFET WERE EQUALLY FAMILIAR WITH THEIR SCHOOL HOUSE AND THEIR BOMB SHELTER.

Tel Aviv: Modern City

The distance from Ein Hashofet to Tel Aviv is about that from Poughkeepsie to New York City. The best way to assure getting to Tel Aviv in under six hours is "to tramp." The roads are filled with soldiers. The landscape is brilliantly lit by the sun, revealing the parched earth, the treeless hills. Only cactus and brush grow wild. There are no green patches of grass, straggling forests, or picturesque waterfalls. Only the growing fields and white houses of agricultural settlements relieve kilometres of arid waste and mud-colored Arab villages. "Nature" is man-made in Palestine.

Most of the quarter of a million population in Tel Aviv live in modern white apartment houses, built close together and of similar style. The streets are too narrow now for the heavy traffic. The screeching of brakes, the honking of horns, the shouts from and to pedestrians compare favorably with midtown New York.

Khaki and foreign languages predominate in Tel Aviv. The soldiers' clubs announce the day's events in five languages, and hostesses are prepared to answer questions in French, English, Spanish, German, Russian, Polish and Italian. The hotels near the Mediterranean have been taken over by the Air Force and Army Headquarters.

The end of Allenby Road, the main street of the city, makes a ninety degree turn to the Sea. It is lined with soda fountains, chocolate shops, and book and shoe stores. At night the promenade along the sea is filled with strolling couples or lonely soldiers eating corn on the cob or "glida". Music of all countries is heard from the cafés, a cacophony of French, modern Hebrew and American jazz. Further north are the more sedate cafés of the hotels for foreign visitors. They con-

tain the only elaborate bars in town and are monopolized by the Press, their dogs and mistresses.

Although Tel Aviv is peaceful now, there are evidences of a costly war. A disproportionate number of disabled soldiers are seen. Families diminished by the war years in Europe have shrunk further in the last six months. The call to military service of all able men and women has curtailed productive work. Prices are high—there are not sufficient quantities of vegetables, milk, and meat. The entrances to all houses are sandbagged or bricked for protection against shells and to provide air raid shelters. Barbed wire blocks off several streets and passes are required.

The city is full of activity. Bulletin boards or columns on every corner announce the week's political, theatrical and musical events. Three theatrical groups are playing. Their repertoires include American plays in Hebrew such as *Deep are the Roots*, *I Remember Mama*, and *The Glass Menagerie*. Tickets are sold for the national opera, and Leonard Bernstein has opened the series of philharmonic concerts. The ten motion picture houses (three performances daily except Saturday) show some of the better French, Russian and English films; but American wares—the *Song of Scheherazade* and Rita Hayworth are most popular.

Curfews, reprisal, fighting, and death have been a part of the lives of the Jews in Israel for the last decade. At the same time they have grown and they have built homes. They have prepared the land for refugees and for others who want to come. They have fought for the right to remain on the land granted them by the United Nations. They have shown they can keep it, that they have the authority to govern it. They have shown that they possess the love and the skill to make Israel a symbol of the progress of man in an area cursed by the cruelty of feudal relationships and imperialist maneuvers.